**Quality and Workforce Committee, Illinois Early Learning Council**

**Minutes – May 15, 2023, 1:00 – 2:30 PM**

**Committee charge**: Address the urgent need to develop, recruit and retain a qualified, diverse workforce representative of the communities served. Identify steps to mitigate the systemic workforce problems without compromising high standards, including accessible pathways and equitable compensation to stabilize the workforce and enhance the public's perception of early educators. Identify and support efforts to improve program quality using a racial equity lens.

**Present:**

CO-CHAIRS: Bela Motè and Christi Chadwick

GOECD Staffer: Tom Layman

MEMBERS: Brynn Seibert, Carisa Hurley Davis, Cathy Mannen, Cerathel Burgess-Burnett, Courtney Hatcher, Dan Harris, Josie Yanguas, Rochelle Golliday, Ruth Kimble, Sara Slaughter, Sergio Hernandez, Teri Talan

OTHERS PRESENT: Angela Farwig (Illinois Action for Children), Anita Andrews-Hutchinson (It Takes a Village), Beata Skorusa (Montessori Foundations of Chicago and CCAU), Bria Carter (Child Care Advocates United), Debra Clark (Joliet Twp. Infant Childcare Center), Donna Emmons (IHSA), Jill Andrews (Kiddie Kollege), Karen Freel (Illinois Association for Infant Mental Health), Lori Harrison (IDHS-DEC Bureau of Quality Initiatives contracts unit), Lynn Burgett (The Center), Marie Masterson (McCormick Center), Marissa Maples (UIC Alt. Licensure Program), Megan Bock (Afton Partners), Mercedes Mondragon (Start Early), Michelle Wood, (IDHS-DEC Bureau of Quality Initiatives), Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro (Latino Policy Forum), Sara Flores (IL Public Health Institute), Veronica Vidal (Erikson), Wendy Connell (McCormick Center)

**Welcome and Introductions**

Christi Chadwick welcomed attendees. Committee members and other participants put their names and affiliations in the Chat.

1. **Minutes of March meeting**

Christi asked for any corrections or discussion of the March meeting minutes. Hearing none, Dan Harris moved to approve the minutes. Josie Yanguas seconded and the minutes were approved.

1. **ExceleRate Illinois proposed framework – Report on Executive Committee discussion**

Christi reported that she introduced this committee’s recommendation for a revised ExceleRate Illinois framework to the Early Learning Council Executive Committee at its meeting on May 5. Teri Talan, co-chair of the former ExceleRate Subcommittee, and Tom Layman, ExceleRate Policy Director, presented a summary of the proposed changes. Executive Committee members were enthusiastic and asked a number of questions. Time ran short and the Executive Committee co-chairs asked that action be tabled until the next meeting. After the meeting, Tom emailed the co-chairs to ask if they would like additional information so we can be prepared for the next meeting.

Josie Yanguas then added that as she looked again at the proposed framework, she thought we need to look further at aligned requirements for language proficiency screening of English Language Learners. Tom said the proposed framework requires such screening. Rebecca Vonderlack-Navarro clarified that we need a common Home Language Survey and ELL proficiency screener. Head Start does not use the same tools as Preschool for All.

1. **Smart Start Contract Development at IDHS**

Christi then introduced Megan Bock from Afton Partners. Megan has been supporting the IDHS Ad-Hoc Committee on Contracts, which provides input on design and implementation of future Smart Start contracts. Megan’s slide presentation is attached at the end of these minutes. She reported that IDHS is considering 3 levels of foundational contracts for programs that do not have layered funding. Decisions will be effective in FY 25. The three levels now under consideration are Workforce Compensation Contracts that could evolve from the current Strengthen and Grow approach, Quality Support Contracts that could evolve from the current ExceleRate Pilot approach, and Targeted Supports for services like extended hours care. FY 24, starting in July, will be a transition year. She said that the committee discussed balancing priorities at its April meeting. After the General Assembly establishes the budget for FY 24, IDHS will have to decide on the wage floor to be required in Workforce Compensation Contracts. IDHS would like to fund the field broadly, but the more programs funded, the lower the wage floor will need to be. Requiring programs to serve a certain percentage of Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) children would reduce the pool of eligible programs, making a higher wage floor possible. The Ad-Hoc Committee discussed the trade-offs and asked for more information on the cost model for its next meeting.

Discussion and feedback followed. Participants asked whether the cost model considers that increased wages will draw more highly qualified people into the field, and how that will affect costs and staffing as time goes on. Jill Andrews reported that as a result of her center’s participation in the ExceleRate Pilot, many staff members have attained higher credentials and therefore draw higher rates of pay. She said once you start, you cannot go back to paying lower wages. Others asked for more details on the cost model. Megan said that details would be discussed at the next Ad-Hoc Committee meeting, and anyone interested in attending should contact Bethany Patten ([Bethany.Patten@illinois.gov](mailto:Bethany.Patten@illinois.gov)). Megan added that family child care is included in the cost modeling and providers will be included in Smart Start Compensation Contracts. Other comments included the need to align strategy with Preschool for All/Prevention Initiative funding so it helps move seamlessly into layered funding contracts.

1. **Committee recommendations on compensation**

Bela Motè asked participants to consider this committee’s draft compensation recommendations included on the agenda. She asked for a final round of discussion so the committee can submit its final recommendations to the Early Learning Council Executive Committee. There was agreement that Recommendation C – expanding initiatives to cover family child care and home visiting – can stand for now as a very general recommendation, and that in any case, Recommendations A and B will include those parts of the workforce. The draft recommendations are copied here; proposed edits are included in bold italics.

* 1. Approve the use of Smart Start compensation & quality contracts. Recommend that as they evolve, they move toward:
     1. A systemic mechanism to fund compensation not dependent on special funding
     2. Support base compensation, not just salary supplements.
     3. Include benefits ***comparable to school district health and retirement plans***.
     4. Address working conditions ***in Smart Start Quality contracts. Include protected time for job-embedded professional development, planning, paid time off, and other items typically negotiated in teacher contracts with school districts***.
  2. Approve the use of minimum salary scales. Recommend that as they evolve, they move toward:
     1. Salary and fringe benefit parity across sectors***and funding streams***, including schools and child care programs, based on degrees and credentials
     2. No positions pay less than thriving wage (as defined by the MIT Living Wage Calculator or similar source) adequate to attract and retain a qualified and diverse workforce
     3. Special attention to salaries of infant/toddler teachers ***to ensure parity with preschool teachers****,* and teachers with bilingual ***and ESL*** credentials ***to compensate them for their specialized expertise. Consider including bilingual staff who may not have a credential. Include staff with special education credentials.***
     4. Salary steps for experience, ***including tenured staff without credentials***.
  3. Recommend that current compensation and quality initiatives be expanded to cover family child care and home visiting

1. **Next steps and next meeting**

Bela said the co-chairs will review and fine tune the recommendations and send to committee members for approval or comment before the next meeting. She said the next meeting will include a review of what other states are doing to support fringe benefits. She asked participants to send Tom any interesting approaches they know about. Regarding fringe benefits, participants noted that although SEIU provides health insurance coverage for family child care providers, the coverage does not extend to staff in family child care homes. Also, participants reiterated the idea of looking at the benefits of the state teacher retirement system. Tom will send a meeting invitation when the next meeting date is set.

1. **Public Comment**

Carisa Hurley Davis reported that the FY 24 RFP for Early Childhood Block Grant programs is available at [www.isbe.net](http://www.isbe.net). Proposals are due June 14. The RFP is for programs outside the City of Chicago and includes 5,000 new seats. Priority will be given to programs in the 178 desert areas identified.

See the following pages for the Afton Partners presentation slides.

We envision Illinois as a place where every young child – regardless of race, ethnicity, income, language, geography, ability, immigration status, or other circumstance – receives the strongest possible start to life so that they grow up safe, healthy, happy, ready to succeed, and eager to learn.

**Racial Equity Definition:** A racially equitable society values and embraces all racial/ethnic identities. In such a society, one’s racial/ethnic identity (particularly Black, Latino, Indigenous, and Asian) is not a factor in an individual’s ability to prosper. An early learning system that is racially equitable is driven by data and ensures that:

• Every young child and family regardless of race, ethnicity, and social circumstance has everything s/he/they need to develop optimally.

• Resources, opportunities, rewards, and burdens are fairly distributed across groups and communities so that those with the greatest challenges are adequately supported and not further disadvantaged; and

• Systems and policies are designed, reframed, or eliminated to promote greater justice for children and families.

**Racial Equity Priorities:**

1. Align and standardize race/ethnicity data collection and reporting.
2. Evaluate and identify whether processes for distributing resources exacerbate racial disparities, including agency contracting.
3. Address race/ethnicity disparities in terms of workforce compensation and advancement.
4. Eliminate racial/ethnic disparities for children participating in all programs that contribute to school readiness and life success by addressing racial disparities in enrollment in preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds and in prenatal to age 3 services.

















